

Tuesday, December 30, 2003

Operation Choke Hold bags bad guys in Baghdad

**Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Mark Bell
372nd MPAD**

BAGHDAD, Iraq - Just days after the capture of Saddam Hussein by coalition forces, 1st Armored Division Soldiers continued driving forward to help liberate the Iraqi people from terrorist activity in their own backyard.

More than 500 paratroopers from the 2nd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division, which is attached to the Germany-based U.S. 1st Armored Division, halted traffic on Highway 8 and cordoned off all escapes avenues during Operation Choke Hold in the Al Rashid District of southern Baghdad on Dec. 16, in hopes of discovering illegal activities on one of Baghdad's busiest highways.

Although Hussein has been captured, Col. Kurt Fuller, 2nd Brigade commander, said there are many operations still to be done. "We are still out there running offensive operations and rounding up these guys and interrogating them and having those interrogations lead to the capture of more bad guys. Everybody knows we are making a difference," he said. "We are not packing our bags and going home just because he was captured. There are still bad guys out there and, as long as they are terrorizing Soldiers and Iraqis, our job isn't done here. It's still business as usual."

With increased improvised explosive device (IED) attacks against coalition forces and Iraqis, Operation Choke Hold and similar operations help commanders disrupt the terrorists' ability to bring IED-making material into Baghdad, a city of more than five million people.

"We are attempting to locate people who are transporting illegal weapons, equipment or IEDs into our area of operations," said Capt. Sam Mokhiber, brigade plans officer.

With the increasing numbers of attacks on coalition forces on Highway 8, Mokhiber said the choice of any operational targets comes from a variety of sources. "Targets are nominated by the battalion, other governmental agencies and special operations Soldiers," he said.

With different sources of intelligence given to brigade intelligence officers, planners are able to make the best decision with the best possible outcome, Mokhiber said. "In the end, we want the bad guys off the streets," he said. "We can disrupt enemy attacks by attempting to disrupt the flow of these illegal weapons and equipment being transported in and out of the city."

Although the best end result would be a large amount of weapons being confiscated, just having U.S. paratroopers out in force on the roads in Baghdad is a deterrent for anyone thinking of committing a crime, he said.

With a good plan and intelligence in hand, the "Blue Falcons" of third battalion, quickly put into motion Operation Choke Hold.

Wearing mud-covered uniforms and vehicles muddied from the previous days of rain, paratroopers from the Falcon brigade spent the early afternoon cleaning their weapons and making last-minute adjustments to the operational plan. Within minutes of notification to move to the highway, several large trucks rolled around the corner, carrying the paratroopers to a



A paratrooper from the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division, searches a vehicle during Operation Choke Hold on Highway 8 in southern Baghdad.

nearby neighborhood for last-minute preparations before the operation would begin.

While 1st Platoon, A Company, Soldiers dismounted the vehicles out of sight of the highway traffic and local onlookers who could give early warning of the search, 1st Armored Division AH-64 Apache attack helicopters kept close watch to serve as eyes in the sky to see around the tight corners while the paratroopers made their way to the busy objective.

Unseen to passing vehicles, the crackling sounds of commands from the tactical radios gave the go-ahead for the swift movement of the loud armored vehicles and military police Humvees to block both ends of the isolated zone on a one-mile stretch of one of Iraq's deadliest roads.

With the help of 1st Armored Division's 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment's M-3A2 Cavalry Fighting Vehicles, Iraqi vehicles were no match for the large armored vehicle's 25mm main gun and the paratroopers' positive attitude and optimistic determination to capture illegal weapons being transported into or around Baghdad.

Within minutes, Highway 8 was transformed into a large traffic jam that resembled any major metropolitan highway during rush hour.

Local Iraqis, most of whom have had experience going through U.S. Army checkpoints, got out of their vehicles and were cooperative with the paratroopers.

With traffic at a complete standstill, paratroopers searched vehicles and marked each one, after the vehicle was checked, with colored soap, to ensure that vehicles were not searched twice.

Within an hour, the search was over, the razor-wire was collected, highway markers were picked up and paratroopers walked back to their waiting vehicles giving each other high-fives after a long afternoon of collective work to make Iraq a better place to live.

"We are making a difference," Fuller said. "There are a million things that have to be done. There's a long way to go. You can't repair 30 years of neglect in a couple months."

The Old Ironsides Report

December 30, 2003

News...

World's Airlines Face Increased Security

WASHINGTON (AP) - The United States will ensure that other governments enforce a new American requirement placing armed law enforcement officers on some flights to prevent hijackings, Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge said Monday as the nation headed into the New Year's holiday with terror threats high. Ridge also assured Americans who may be concerned about holiday air travel that aviation in the United States since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks "has risen to new heights of security." He encouraged Americans to continue with their holiday plans, even amid the orange alert level, or high alert status, put in place more than a week ago.

Four Iranian Earthquake Survivors Found

BAM, Iran (AP) - As search crews despaired of finding more survivors from Iran's devastating earthquake, Monday brought moments of hope: Rescuers pulled a girl out alive from the rubble of her caved-in house, and three men believed dead stirred in their white burial shrouds. More than 25,000 bodies have been retrieved since Friday's 6.6-magnitude quake shook the ancient city of Bam and its surrounding region in southeast Iran, according to provincial government spokesman Asadollah Iranmanesh. At least 10,000 people were believed injured.

U.S.: Diseased Cow Born Before Feed Ban

WASHINGTON (AP) - Authorities said Monday they are looking for links between the Holstein infected with mad cow disease and a Canadian cow that was diagnosed with the deadly illness in May. Repeating their insistence that the U.S. food supply is safe, agriculture officials also said they are searching for 81 Canadian-born cows from the same herd as the sick Holstein that records indicate entered the United States in late 2001.

Libya Said in Early Stage of Nuke Program

TRIPOLI, Libya (AP) - Libya received its nuclear technology from a "sophisticated" international network but not necessarily with the knowledge of any government, the U.N. nuclear chief said after touring four atomic sites and meeting on Monday with the country's leader, Moammar Gadhafi. Mohamed ElBaradei also said Libya's technology was of a "familiar design" - meaning its origins would not be hard to trace - and that its nuclear program was not advanced. "What we have seen is a program in the very initial stages of development," he said.

Rivals Attack Dean Over Energy Task Force

WASHINGTON (AP) - Casting aside Howard Dean's plea to tone down their criticisms, the other Democratic presidential candidates said Monday that revelations the former Vermont governor had an energy task force that met in secret like the Bush administration is further proof he is ill-suited to challenge the president next fall. "The more we learn about Howard Dean's record as governor, the more difficult position he'll be in to criticize the Bush administration," Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman said, responding to an Associated Press story Sunday.

Sports...

Gregg Williams Out As Bills' Coach

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. (AP) -- Gregg Williams is out as the Buffalo Bills' coach after missing the playoffs in three straight seasons.

In a meeting Monday afternoon, team president Tom Donahoe told Williams his contract won't be renewed. The Bills later announced the move.

Williams went 17-31, never finishing a season above .500. The Bills were 6-10 this season, which ended with a 31-0 loss at New England on Saturday.

"We weren't able to do as well as I thought this year, but Tom has put the team in the right position," Williams said. "I'm sorry I wasn't able to take it to the next level."

He wouldn't respond to reporters' questions. Williams turned down a contract extension last spring. The former Tennessee Titans defensive coordinator became the Bills' head coach in February 2001, replacing Wade Phillips.

After a 3-13 rookie season, Williams led the Bills to an 8-8 mark last season.

But Williams' inability to develop an improved roster into a playoff contender played a part in the team's decision. The Bills played below Donahoe's expectations this season, after bolstering the defense with free-agent additions such as linebacker Takeo Spikes, tackle Sam Adams and safety Lawyer Milloy.

"We have regressed, and I didn't have confidence we could turn that around," Donahoe said.

Buffalo opened this year with two straight victories - including a 31-0 rout of New England in Week 1.

But the Bills unraveled down the stretch, losing seven of their last nine games, including their last two by a combined 51-3.

Williams' play-calling was second-guessed, and he and offensive coordinator Kevin Gilbride drew criticism for a sputtering offense.

By the end of this season, several players - including cornerback Antoine Winfield and running back Travis Henry - publicly questioned the pass-first offensive philosophy.

And now the Bills join the Giants, Falcons, Bears and Cardinals in searching for a new head coach.

Among those considered candidates to replace Williams are Jim Fassel, who was fired by the Giants, and Tom Coughlin, out of the NFL for a year after being dismissed by the Jaguars.

Bryant Case Voted AP Sports Story of Year

(AP) - The young hotel worker's accusation was shocking enough: Thrilled by a chance encounter with a celebrity, she went to his room only to be forced over a chair and sexually assaulted. More startling was the name of the accused: Kobe Bryant. Even with a trial months away, it became the most-watched case against a celebrity sports figure since O.J. Simpson was charged with murder. It was chosen the story of the year by the newspaper and broadcast members of The Associated Press.

The Old Ironsides Report December 30, 2003

Start Time	SPORTS	ATLANTIC	SPECTRUM	PACIFIC	NEWS	Start Time
0:00	COLLEGE BASKETBALL - ACC: DAVIDSON @ DUKE	HEADLINE NEWS	AMERICAN CHOPPER	TODAY		0:00
0:30		TONIGHT SHOW WITH JAY LENO			HEADLINE NEWS	0:30
1:00			HARVEY		LESTER HOLT LIVE	1:00
1:30		THE LATE SHOW WITH DAVID LETTERMAN				1:30
2:00	SPORTSCENTER			SESAME STREET	HEADLINE NEWS	2:00
2:30		ACCESS HOLLYWOOD			NBC NIGHTLY NEWS	2:30
3:00		ESPNEWS	RUGRATS : - CURSE OF THE WEREWUFF	DRAGON TALES : - A CROWN FOR PRINCESS KIDOODLE/	ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT	3:00
3:30	SPORTS SPECIAL - ESPN 100: THE YEAR IN SPORTS	ESPNEWS	SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS : - THE ALGAE'S ALWAYS GREENER/ SPONGE GAURD ON DUTY	WHEEL OF FORTUNE	CBS EVENING NEWS	3:30
4:00		NFL TOTAL ACCESS	THE SIMPSONS : - PARENT RAP	THE DR. PHIL SHOW	THE NEWSHOUR	4:00
4:30			HOME IMPROVEMENT : - TROUBLE-A-BRUIN			4:30
5:00	NHL - NY RANGERS @ PHOENIX COYOTES	COLLEGE FOOTBALL - 2003 ALAMO BOWL: NEBRASKA VS MICHIGAN STATE	J.A.G. : - COMPLICATIONS	THE OPRAH WINFREY SHOW	HANNITY & COLMES	5:00
6:00			THE PRACTICE : - VANISHED (PT. 2)	NBC NIGHTLY NEWS	THE NEWS WITH BRIAN WILLIAMS	6:00
6:30				JUDGE JUDY		6:30
7:00			CELEBRITY PROFILES : - JEFF BRIDGES	ACCESS HOLLYWOOD	BET NIGHTLY NEWS	7:00
7:25				GUIDING LIGHT		7:25
7:30	ESPNEWS				NIGHTLY BUSINESS REPORT	7:30
8:00	NBA FASTBREAK	HEADLINE NEWS	THE AGE OF INNOCENCE		LARRY KING LIVE	8:00
8:13				GENERAL HOSPITAL		8:13
8:30	ESPNEWS	HEADLINE NEWS				8:30
9:00	NFL TOTAL ACCESS	SESAME STREET		DISNEY'S PB&J OTTER : - INVITATION TO THE SNOOTIE/ TOO HOT FOR FISHICLES	NEWSNIGHT WITH AARON BROWN	9:00
9:30				WHAT'S NEW SCOOPY DOO? : - RIVA RAS REGAS		9:30
10:00	SPORTSCENTER	DRAGON TALES : - A CROWN FOR PRINCESS KIDOODLE/		THAT'S SO RAVEN : - TEST OF FRIENDSHIP	PAULA ZAHN NOW	10:00
10:30		WHEEL OF FORTUNE	EBERT & ROEPER AT THE MOVIES	THE AMANDA SHOW		10:30
11:00	NHL - ST. LOUIS BLUES @ COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS	THE DR. PHIL SHOW	RUGRATS : - CURSE OF THE WEREWUFF	JEOPARDYI	NIGHTLINE	11:00
11:30			SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS : - THE ALGAE'S ALWAYS GREENER/ SPONGE GAURD ON DUTY	HEADLINE NEWS	NAVY/MARINE CORPS NEWS	11:30
11:46		THE OPRAH WINFREY SHOW				11:46
11:52				PACIFIC REPORT		11:52
12:00			THE SIMPSONS : - PARENT RAP	ESPNEWS	HARDBALL WITH CHRIS MATTHEWS	12:00
12:30			HOME IMPROVEMENT : - TROUBLE-A-BRUIN	HEADLINE NEWS		12:30
12:35		GUIDING LIGHT				12:35
12:52				PACIFIC REPORT		12:52
13:00			J.A.G. : - COMPLICATIONS	SMALLVILLE : - VISAGE	THE O'REILLY FACTOR	13:00
13:17		GENERAL HOSPITAL				13:17
13:30	SPORTSCENTER					13:30
14:00		HEADLINE NEWS	THE PRACTICE : - VANISHED (PT. 2)	MR. DEEDS	DATELINE	14:00
14:30	COLLEGE BASKETBALL - BIG XII: GEORGE WASHINGTON @ TEXAS	JUDGE JUDY				14:30
15:00		TODAY	CELEBRITY PROFILES : - JEFF BRIDGES		GOOD MORNING AMERICA	15:00
16:00			THE AGE OF INNOCENCE	HEADLINE NEWS		16:00
16:22				PACIFIC REPORT		16:22
16:30	ESPNEWS			TONIGHT SHOW WITH JAY LENO		16:30
17:00	COLLEGE FOOTBALL - 2003 ALAMO BOWL: NEBRASKA VS MICHIGAN STATE	DISNEY'S PB&J OTTER : - INVITATION TO THE SNOOTIE/ TOO HOT FOR FISHICLES			HEADLINE NEWS	17:00
17:30		WHAT'S NEW SCOOPY DOO? : - RIVA RAS REGAS		THE LATE SHOW WITH DAVID LETTERMAN	ABC WORLD NEWS THIS MORNING	17:30
18:00		THAT'S SO RAVEN : - TEST OF FRIENDSHIP			THE EARLY SHOW	18:00
18:30		THE AMANDA SHOW	EBERT & ROEPER AT THE MOVIES	ACCESS HOLLYWOOD		18:30
19:00	SPORTSCENTER	JEOPARDYI	RUGRATS : - CURSE OF THE WEREWUFF	ARACHNOPHOBIA		19:00
19:30		HEADLINE NEWS	SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS : - THE ALGAE'S ALWAYS GREENER/ SPONGE GAURD ON DUTY			19:30
20:00	BEST DAMN SPORTS SHOW PERIOD	ESPNEWS	THE SIMPSONS : - PARENT RAP		FOX NEWS LIVE	20:00
20:30		HEADLINE NEWS	HOME IMPROVEMENT : - TROUBLE-A-BRUIN			20:30
21:00	COLLEGE FOOTBALL - CHICK-FIL-A PEACH BOWL PREVIEW	SMALLVILLE : - VISAGE	J.A.G. : - COMPLICATIONS	ON THE WATERFRONT	DATELINE	21:00
21:30	COLLEGE FOOTBALL - OUTBACK BOWL PREVIEW					21:30
22:00	ESPNEWS	MR. DEEDS	THE PRACTICE : - VANISHED (PT. 2)		FOX NEWS LIVE	22:00
22:30	SPORTS SPECIAL - ESPN 100: THE YEAR IN SPORTS					22:30
23:00			CELEBRITY PROFILES : - JEFF BRIDGES	ESPNEWS	HEADLINE NEWS	23:00
23:30				HEADLINE NEWS	INSIDE POLITICS	23:30